



Bringing Up ASD Concerns

How to Set-Up the Conversation

Discussing concerns you have about autism with families is important. You can support families in recognizing the signs by using the following process.

- **First, point out signs of autism using “I wonder” statements.** *“I wonder why he stays focused on his cars and doesn’t notice that you’re building a garage.”*
- **Make connections between the signs and the child’s learning.** *“I wonder if focusing only on his cars makes it hard for him to learn new play ideas from you.”*
- **Wait for the caregiver to ask why.** This is a sign that the caregiver may be ready to hear your opinion and advice.
- **Connect the sign to the word “autism.”** *“Focusing on objects more than people is one potential sign of autism.”*
- **Acknowledge the caregiver’s opinions and beliefs.** *“You’re right, he does love cars! He’s doing a great job of making the driving noise as he plays with them. And we’ve both noticed that he has a hard time paying attention to other people while he plays with them.”*
- **Allow yourself to be vulnerable.** *“I might be wrong, but I want to make sure we aren’t missing anything that could prevent his progress.”*
- **Continue the conversation.** Conducting a screener, such as the Screening Tool for Autism in Toddlers and Young Children (STAT), can help you discuss additional signs and prepare the parent for a later evaluation.

Guiding Principles

- **Be honest and direct.** Use the word “autism” and give specific examples of what you’re seeing.
- **Give wait time.** Allow the caregiver to process each statement
- **Seek input.** Ask how what you’re seeing compares to the child in their daily life
- **Practice active listening.** Seek understanding by asking open-ended questions. Your job is to be honest about your concerns, not to convince the caregiver.
- **Be compassionate.** Respond to the caregiver’s feelings by reflecting rather than trying to fix. Make comments such as “I can imagine...” rather than, “Everything will be ok.”
- **Use help-giving strategies.** Highlight the caregiver’s strengths and help them identify their own concerns and needs